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ABSTRACT

Because of its exploration of human conflicts, its examination of the capability of society and the individual relationships within it, and its focus on universal moral issues, Sophocles' "Antigone" is a relevant addition to secondary school core curricula. "Antigone" is effective in responding to each of Philip Anderson's four rationales for curricula: (1) the "high culture model," which addresses universal themes such as man versus God, and society versus the individual; (2) the "democratic culture model," which expresses the theme "one must obey the higher law" and can be related to contemporary American society; (3) the "social development/social reconstruction model," which provides values clarification through meaningful parallels with the play; and (4) the "psycholinguistic model," which helps students understand the history of words and the development of figurative language and rhetorical techniques. (A handout comparing different translations of the play, and an exercise on figurative language are appended.) (MM)

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Antigone: A Play for All Curricula

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Like all teachers I approach some literature in the curriculum with enthusiasm and some with considerably less than enthusiasm. Pope's "Rape of the Lock" anchors the "dread scale" for me, but Sophocles' Antigone is right up at the other end with The Great Gatsby and The Catcher in the Rye. I thought immediately of it when I read Nancy McHugh's announcement of the NCTE convention theme: "To survive morally and spiritually, we make connections with the great literature and great ideas which have sustained us and will sustain us in the challenging years ahead." Its relevance makes it eligible for high school literature study no matter what the curriculum base. I present it here with relation to the four rationales for curricula described by Philip Anderson last year ("The Past IS Now: Approaches to the Secondary School Liteature Curriculum," December 1986, pp.19-22) in English Journal. I believe I will not be telling you anything you have not already known or felt about Antigone itself. I believe I am presenting old wine in new bottles. But the old wine is the superb millenia-old vintage from 5th century B.C. Greece, and the new bottles are the curricula needing to be filled in twentieth century America.

Antigone most obviously fits the "high culture model" whose basic purpose is to provide what Matthew Arnold called "the best that has been thought and written" in Western civilization. This curriculum is most assuredly for the college bound students; it is to be rich with what is currently called "cultural literacy." As such, Antigone is a torch-bearing

CS211002

work. It has fascinated humanity for centuries because it contains so many of the principal human conflicts: man vs. woman, youth vs. age, son vs. father, society vs. the individual, public welfare vs. private conscience, the living vs. the dead, man vs. God, justice vs. mercy. In the words of George Steiner who published his book Antigones (New York: Oxford, 1984) about the work's universality, it is "recursive and timeless," and "invites us to assimilate the condition of man on this earth."

The second curriculum Anderson describes is the "democratic culture model" for which texts must be appropriate for educating youths to an understanding of their society. When I think of this goal, I tell my students, "You may think we are going to ancient Thebes for a week, but you are going to find that Antigone in a very important sense is as American as apple pie." If we take its dominant theme "One must obey the higher law," we see how strongly it relates to one major interpretive thread of American history. Of course, this is not the sole interpretation, but we can significantly describe the development of our country's democracy through this theme. Our Founding Fathers stated in the opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence that "the laws of Nature and Nature's God" took precedence over King George's laws. A half century later Henry David Thoreau could not in conscience pay even his paltry tax to support the Mexican War he believed was wrong, and so he took the consequence of jailing and wrote his classic statement "Civil Disobedience" about dissent in a democracy. The Abolitionists believed that the law of the land declaring fellow human beings goods and chattel was wrong, and so they founded the Underground Railroad. Southerners--perhaps best represented by Robert E. Lee--had to decide which law was higher--the law of the Union or of the State. Martin

Luther King led the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's in determination to show that Constitutional rights were being violated by Jim Crow laws. Young men of my generation had to decide whether to obey the country's draft law and fight in the Vietnam Conflict which they believed was immoral; many of them chose to obey the law while others expatriated or went to jail. I tell my students I do not know whether they will have to make a comparable decision, but if they do, recalling Antigone and her American counterparts may help them. What is fundamental and valuable in the play is that Sophocles honors human freedom to consider and choose by allowing Antigone to struggle with superior force and achieve a moral victory despite the loss of her life. A democracy is in part shaped by the recurrence of this situation.

The third curriculum Anderson describes is "the social development/ social reconstruction model." It seems to me to flow from the democratic culture model because it aims for psychologically adjusted individuals who will collectively strengthen society as a whole. Antigone is an excellent touchstone for values clarification presenting as it does both family loyalties and family dissent. The mythic Greek background provides the psychological distance necessary to examine those values as objectively as possible; as J.R. Squire observed in The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories (Urbana: NCTE, 1964, p. 54) adolescents can reject as too painful material closely associated with their own problems. However, Antigone leaves them free to make meaningful parallels if and as they wish.

I provide the opportunity for this by assigning a creative "Antigone Project." Some students memorize and enact a scene; others write short

stories or poems developing one of the themes of the play; some draw portraits of the characters. Some like to review recent newspapers and magazines for contemporary conflicts similar to Antigone's. They report to the class situations such as Father Curran's with the Vatican, the Sanctuary Movement's with the INS, employees' with companies violating environmental laws, and even the Fundamentalists' with the public schools. Perhaps the most striking of all is Bishop Tutu's with the South African government because his situation is amazingly similar to Antigone's. For anyone who thinks that risking life to perform a burial ritual is centuries outdated, I wish to read from an AP story from the fall of 1985: "Johannesburg, South Africa--Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu told about 1000 mourners at a funeral today that he would defy new bans on public services for victims of racial unrest....Tutu said...he would 'continue to speak at all meetings, responsibly, as a minister....I listen only to God, not to any other authority.'"

Here in the U.S. just a few months ago Joyce Maynard reported in her column about a 60 year-old Morton Grove woman who is in jail for non-violent acts of protest at a nuclear weapons site: "What Gump decided...was that she would break the law. 'The most important changes for the benefit of our society have come from people standing up for their rights,' she says. 'The Boston Tea Party. The Montgomery bus boycott. You can say without law we'll have anarchy, but I have to believe that any law that protects the manufacture of nuclear weapons is immoral. And finally, the law I have to follow is God's.'"

The fourth curriculum is the "psycholinguistic model" which in part seeks works that can help students to understand the history of words and

the development of figurative language and rhetorical techniques. Antigone is excellent for this. Quite by accident I found my class in possession of several different translations; the resulting comparisons of words, phrases, metaphors and their nuances proved so enlightening as the students discussed the effects on characterization, motivation, and reader response, that I now include two translations by choice. I have a handout to show you how comparisons can work. (See appended material).

Also included in the handout is my exercise on figurative language. I have discovered that high school juniors are very good at discriminating the different kinds of metaphors. I review the ones listed with examples from another Greek play. They take notes; then each is assigned a section of Antigone to cull and report on. The result is a profitable discussion of style as well as a tie-in to what Aristotle says about diction in The Poetics which we study prior to Antigone.

The chorus provides a focus on rhetorical and dramatic techniques; it can be linked to the importance of narrator, point of view, and moral focus in modern literature and communication.

I would like to conclude with a quote from the First Choral Ode which in my opinion is equaled only by Shakespeare's "What a work is man" passage in Hamlet. I use the Fitzgerald translation: "Numberless are the world's wonders, but none/ More wonderful than man...All things are taken, tamed in the net of his mind...." Sophocles gives us Antigone from the net of his mind. It deserves to be a part of core curricula in the twentieth century United States, taken into the minds of our students for the enrichment of their lives.

ANTIGONE: Comparative translations of opening lines:

JEBB, 1900:

Ismene, sister, mine own dear sister, knowest
thou what ill there is, of all bequeathed by
Oedipus, that Zeus fulfills not for us twain while
we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught
with ruin, no shame, no dishonour, that I have
not seen in thy woes and mine.
And now what new edict is this of which they tell,
that our Captain hath just published to all Thebes?
Knowest thou aught? Hast thou heard? Or is it
hidden from thee that our friends are threatened
with the doom of our foes?

CAMPBELL, 1906

Own sister of my blood, one life with me,
Ismene, have the tidings caught thine ear?
Say, hath not Heaven decreed to execute
On thee and me, while yet we are alive,
All the evil Oedipus bequeathed? All horror,
All pain, all outrage, falls on us! And now
The general's proclamation of today--
Hast thou not heard?--Art thou so slow to hear
When harm from foes threatens the souls we love?

WATLING, 1947

O sister! Ismene dear, dear sister Ismene!
You know how heavy the hand of God is upon us;
How we who are left must suffer for our father Oedipus.
There is no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, no dishonour
We have not shared together, you and I.
And now there is something more. Have you heard this order,
This latest order that the King has proclaimed to the city?
Have you heard how our dearest are being treated like enemies?

FITZGERALD AND FITTS, 1947

Ismene, dear sister,
You would think that we had already suffered enough
For the curse on Oedipus:
I cannot imagine any grief
That you and I have not gone through. And now--
Have they told you the new decree of our King Creon?

WYCKOFF, 1954

My sister, my Ismene, do you know
of any suffering from our father sprung
that Zeus does not achieve for us survivors?
There's nothing grievous, nothing free from doom,
nothing shameful, nothing dishonored, I've not seen.
Your sufferings and mine.
And now, what of this edict which they say
the commander has proclaimed to the whole people?
Have you heard anything? Or don't you know
that the foes' trouble comes upon our friends?

FAGLES, 1983

My own flesh and blood--dear sister, dear Ismene,
how many griefs our father Oedipus handed down!
Do you know one, I ask you, one grief
that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us
while we still live and breathe? There's nothing,
no pain--our lives are pain--no private shame,
no public disgrace, nothing I haven't seen
in your griefs and mine. And now this:
an emergency decree, they say, the Commander
has just declared for all of Thebes.
What, haven't you heard? Don't you see?
The doom reserved for enemies
marches on the ones we love most.

The following are passages whose translations have provided very interesting discussions:

	WATLING	FITZGERALD
1. Sentry describing Antigone at Polyneices' body	There was the girl, screaming like an angry bird When it finds its nest left empty and little ones gone. Just like that she screamed, seeing the body Naked, crying and cursing the ones had done it.	And then we looked, and there was Antigone! I have seen A mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard Her crying bitterly a broken note or two For the young ones stolen. Just so when this girl Found the bare corpse
2. Sentry commenting on Creon	To think that thinking men should think so wrongly!	How dreadful it is when the right judges judge wrong!
3. Chorus on the curse of Oedipus	In life and death is the House of Labdacus stricken. Generation to generation With no atonement, It is scourged by the wrath of a god. And now for the dead dust's sake is the light of promise, The tree's last root, crushed out By pride of heart and the sin of presumptuous tongue.	I have seen this gathering sorrow from long time past Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation from generation Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god. So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty.

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DICTION

"The perfection of Diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean.... On the other hand the Diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic by the use of unfamiliar terms, i.e. strange words, metaphors, lengthened forms, and everything that deviates from the ordinary modes of speech.... These, the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental equivalent etc. will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness."

-Aristotle (trans. Bywater)

Before taking Antigone with the class, I go over some of the uses of diction in Greek plays. I use illustrations from Agamemnon by Aeschylus (Watling translation). The students find examples from Antigone in the passage assigned to them (the ones listed here are from the Fitzgerald translation).

"DIRECT" or "PLAIN" DESCRIPTIVE IMAGERY

Agamemnon: The soldier-herald returning from Troy says: "Out of the sky, out of the marshy flats/ the dews soaked us, turned the ruts we fought from/ into gullies, made our gear, our scalps / crawl with lice. And talk of the cold,/ the sleet to freeze the gulls, and the big snows/ come avalanching down from Ida. Oh but the heat, / the sea and windless noons, the swells/ dropped to a dead calm."
Antigone: The sentry explains: "After those terrible threats of yours, King,/ We went back and brushed the dust away from the body./ The flesh was soft by now, and stinking,/ So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard./No napping this time! We kept each other awake./ But nothing happened until the white round sun/ Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:/ Then, suddenly,/ A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky/ Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees...."

METAPHOR ("But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars." -Aristotle)

Agamemnon:

1. "Plain" metaphor: "I know the stars by heart, the armies of the night...." "We are the old, dishonoured ones,/ the broken husks of men." "When trouble comes a stroke of the wet sponge,/ and the picture's blotted out."

   Antigone: "So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line/ Drank the sunlight!" "All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind...."

2. Extended metaphor
   Agamemnon:long passage about Helen and Paris like a pet lion, "a captivating pet" at first that turns to its "parent strains" and "paid its breeders back" by attacking and killing its masters in a "massacre vast and raw."

   Antigone: "Ship of state" metaphor in Creon's first speech

3. personification
   Agamemnon: "War, the great gold-broker of corpses"; "the old comrade, Terror, at my neck"; "Those enemies...fire and water/ sealed a pact and showed it to the world—/they crushed our wretched squadron." "Lady Luck...perched on the helm"

   Antigone: the sun as a warrior: "O marching light...Striking the white shields of the enemy/ Thrown headlong backward from the blaze of morning!"

4. simile
   Agamemnon: "rumors broke like fever and then rose higher"
   Antigone: "Thebes...rose like a dragon behind him shouting war."

5. double metaphors
   Agamemnon: Menelaus and Agamemnon are "like vultures robbed of their young... soaring high from the nest...rowing their wings,/ stroke upon churning, thrashing stroke...."

   Antigone: "Damnation rises behind each child/ Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast, / When the long darkness under sea roars up/ And bursts drumming death upon the wind-whipped sand."

6. synechdoche
   Agamemnon: "We're all the spear has left" (returning warriors are unscathed by battle weapons of the enemy). "Even Heracles had to endure the bitter bread of slaves."
   Antigone:"The inflexible heart breaks first..." "sold your sould for silver...." "God hates utterly/ The bray of bragging tongues...." "honest hearts corrupted...."

7. metonymy
   Agamemnon: "Hermes...our shield and our prayer" "our dearest shield lies here battered"
   Antigone: "Thebes...you see me now the last/ Unhappy daughter of a line of kings...." "Do not pray any more: the sky is deaf."

OXYMORON

Agamemnon: "Zeus, great nameless one"; "barbaric song"; the gods have "violent love" for men so that men must suffer, "suffer unto truth."
Antigone: "I say that this crime is holy...." "But all your strength is weakness...."

HYPERBOLE

Agamemnon: "Menelaus and lord Agamemnon...launched Greece in a thousand ships/ armadas cutting loose from the land/ armies massed for the cause, the rescue—/the heart within them screamed for all-out war!"
Antigone: "All my life long/ I have been a kind of butt for the dull arrows/ Of doddering fortune-tellers!"

LITOTES
Agamemnon: "Make me rich with no man's envy."
Antigone: "Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of honor/ You walk at last into the underworld."

ONOMATOPOEIA
Agamemnon: "And she left her land chaos, clanging shields,/ companions tramping, bronze prows, men in bronze...."
Antigone: "I heard/ A strange note in their jangling, a scream, a / Whirring fury; I knew they were fighting,/ Tearing each other, dying/ In a whirlwind of wings clashing."

STICHOMYTHIA short, intense one-line exchanges of dialogue, especially in altercation or dispute, these are effective dramatic and rhetorical contrast to the longer odes and speeches rich in figurative language. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra arguing about the red carpet is a good example as are other exchanges between Clytemnestra or Cassandra with the Chorus. In Antigone part of the argument between Haimon and Creon uses stichomythia as does the argument between Creon and Teiresias.